



BOARD OF PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY
of the
SUPREME COURT OF TENNESSEE

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RELEASE OF INFORMATION
RE: SUSANNA LAWS THOMAS, BPR NO. 11190
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BOARD OF PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY
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April 16, 2002

COCKE COUNTY LAWYER CENSURED

Susanna Laws Thomas, a Cocke County attorney, was publicly censured by the Board of Professional Responsibility on April 10, 2002. A public censure is a form of public discipline which declares the conduct of the lawyer improper but does not limit the lawyer's right to practice law.

The censure was issued by the Board of Professional Responsibility and a request to vacate was not timely filed by Ms. Thomas. The Board of Professional Responsibility determined that Ms. Thomas had falsely represented to the judge in the courtroom where she worked as an assistant public defender that a criminal defendant, who at the time was incarcerated in the Cocke County jail, had a sentencing hearing on federal charges, to which he had plead guilty, scheduled within the next few days. Ms. Thomas, who was not counsel of record for this criminal defendant in any matter, prepared a proposed order and submitted it to the Cocke County Circuit Court to obtain the defendant's temporary release from the Cocke County jail on that false basis. She also accompanied this criminal defendant on a trip outside of the jurisdiction during his temporary release from the Cocke County jail. Ms. Thomas was aware of a Federal Court ruling that this criminal defendant was required to inform federal authorities of any changes in his custody because he would revert to federal custody under those circumstances. Ms. Thomas accompanied him on the trip out of the jurisdiction, however, despite the fact that he had not complied with this ruling and had failed to inform federal authorities of his whereabouts during his temporary release from the Cocke County jail. While on this trip out of the jurisdiction with the criminal defendant, Ms. Thomas was arrested in a motel in the company of the criminal defendant and was charged with resisting an officer without violence, although these charges against her were later dropped. Altogether, her conduct was prejudicial to the administration of justice and adversely reflected on her fitness to practice law. She failed to comply with known local customs of courtesy or practice, engaged in undignified conduct degrading to the tribunal, intentionally violated court rules, and improperly used or attempted to use the respect accorded her position as an Assistant Public Defender to influence the court to issue the order temporarily releasing the criminal defendant from jail in violation of DR 1-102(A)(1)(4)(5)(6), DR 7-106(A)(C)(5)(6)(7) and DR 8-101(B)(2).

